THE HANDBOOK OF RELIGIONS IN ANCIENT EUROPE

EUROPEAN HISTORY OF RELIGIONS

Series editors: Olav Hammer and Tim Jensen

The Handbook of Religions in Ancient Europe
Edited by Lisbeth Bredholt Christensen, Olav Hammer and David A. Warburton

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ACUMEN

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A note on Greek and Latin sources

In order to make this book accessible to a broad, non-specialist readership, Greek and Latin sources are not referred to by means of the abbreviations preferred by most classical scholars. Instead, the following conventions have been adopted:

- For works that have widely known English titles, these have been used: Plato's *Republic*, the *Iliad*, or Hesiod's *Works and Days*.
- Where only one source text by an author survives, references are to the author's name. Thus, chapters refer to Livy, and leave the title of his work *Ex urbe condita* implicit.
- Other sources are on their first occurrence in a chapter identified by the name of the author, followed by full Latin title and an English translation placed in parentheses; for example, Arnobius *Adversus nationes* (*Against the pagans*). On subsequent occurrences in the same chapter, the English titles are used. Exceptions to this rule are works whose Latin titles verge on being untranslatable proper names: Clement of Alexandria *Protrepticus*; Ovid *Amores*.

Most classical sources have been published and translated in numerous editions and are also available online. They are thus easily accessible in a wide range of translations, versions and formats, and unless references are to specific translations, further bibliographic information for Latin and Greek sources is not provided in the reference list at the back of this volume.

Abbreviations and short titles

Bdr	*Baldrs draumar*: see G. Jónsson (ed.) 1954. *Eddukvæði* 1–2. Akureyri.
Bósa saga ok Herrauðs	See G. Jónsson (ed.) 1954. *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda* 3. Akureyri.
CIL	*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*.
CIMRM	Maarten J. Vermaseren 1956–60. *Corpus Inscriptionum et Monumentorum Religionis Mithriacae*, 2 vols. The Hague.
DK	Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz (eds) 1985. *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker.* Zürich.
Egils saga	S. Nordal (ed.) 1933. *Egils saga Skalla-Grìmsonar.* Reykjavík.
Eriks saga viðförla	See G. Jónsson & B. Vilhjálmsson (eds) 1943–4. *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda* 3. Reykjavík.
ET	H. Rix, G. Meiser, F. Kouba, D. Steinbauer, L. Rübekeil *et al.* (eds) 1991. *Etruskische Texte. Editio minor*, 2 vols.). Tübingen.
Eyr	E. Ó. Sveinsson & M. Þórðarson (eds) 1935. *Eyrbyggjasaga.* Reykjavík.
Flat	*Flateyarbók I–III.* 1860–68. Christiania.
Fragmenta Graecorum Historiarum (FGrHist)	F. Jacoby 1923–. *Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*. Berlin.
Gisla saga Súrsonar	See B. K. þórólfsson & G. Jónsson (eds) 1943. *Vestfirðinga sögur.* Reykjavík.
Glf	*Gylfaginning.* In Snorri Sturluson 2005. *The Prose Edda*, J. Byock (trans.). London.
Glossaria Latina Lindsay	W. M. Lindsay (ed.) 1913. *Glossaria Latina iussu Academiae britannicae edita* (Societé anonyme d'edition "Les Belles Lettres"), 2nd edn, vol. 4. Oxford.
Grm	*Grímnismál*: see G. Jónsson (ed.) 1954. *Eddukvæði* 1–2. Akureyri.
Hákonar herðibreðs saga	See F. Jónsson (ed.) 1911. *Heimskringla. Noregs konungsögur.* Copenhagen.
Hákonarmál	Part of the *Sögu Hákonar goði*, in F. Jónsson (ed.) 1911. *Heimskringla. Noregs konungsögur.* Copenhagen.

Hálfdanar saga svarta	See F. Jónsson (ed.) 1911. *Heimskringla. Noregs konungasögur*. Copenhagen.
Hallfreðar saga	See E. Ó. Sveinsson (ed.) 1949. *Vatnsdœla saga.* Reykjavík.
Hár	*Hárbarðsljóð*: see G. Jónsson (ed.) 1954b. *Eddukvæði* 1–2. Akureyri.
Háv	*Hávamál*: see G. Jónsson (ed.) 1954. *Eddukvæði* 1–2. Akureyri.
Hdl	*Hyndluljoð*: see G. Jónsson (ed.) 1954. *Eddukvæði* 2. Akureyri.
Helga kviða Hundingsbana II	See G. Jónsson (ed.) 1954. *Eddukvæði* 1–2. Akureyri.
Hkr	F. Jónsson (ed.) 1911. *Heimskringla. Noregs konungsögur.* Copenhagen.
Hrolfs saga kráka	See G. Jónsson (ed.) 1954a. *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda* 1–4. Akureyri.
ibn Fadlan	S. Wikander 1978. *Araber, vikingar och väringar.* Nyhamnsläge.
ibn Rosteh	T. Lewicki (ed. and trans.) 1977. *Kitab al'laq an-nafisa* (Źródła arabskie do dziejów Słowiańszczyzny, vol. 2, part 2). Wrocław.
ILLRP	A. Degrassi (ed.) 1957–65. *Inscriptiones Latinae Liberae Rei Publicae*. Florence.
ILS	H. Dessau 1892–1916. *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*. Berlin.
Knytlinga saga	See B. Gudnason (ed.) 1982. *Danakonunga Sögur*. Reykjavík.
Kormáks saga	See Ól. Sveinsson (ed.) 1939. *Vatnsdælasaga*. Reykjavík.
LIMC	H. C. Ackermann & J.-R. Gisler (eds) 1981–99. *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae.* Zürich.
Ls	*Lokasenna*: see G. Jónsson (ed.) 1954. *Eddukvæði* 1–2. Akureyri.
Óláfs saga Helga	See F. Jónsson (ed.) 1911. *Heimskringla. Noregs konungsögur.* Copenhagen.
Örvar-Odds saga	See G. Jónsson (ed.) 1954. *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda* 1–4. Akureyri.
Primary Chronicle	Samuel Hazzard Cross & Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor (trans. & eds) 1953. *The Russian Primary Chronicle, Laurentian Text*. Cambridge, MA. (Original text: I. F. Karskoy [ed.] 1926. *Povest vremennykh let*. In Lavrentevskaya Letopis, Polnoe Sobranie Russkikh Letopisey, vol.1, part 1. Leningrad.)
Rt	*Rígsþula*: see G. Jónsson (ed.) 1954. *Eddukvæði* 1–2. Akureyri.
Santuari	G. Colonna (ed.) 1985. *Santuari d'Etruria*. Milan.
Saxo Grammaticus (*Saxo*)	Saxo Grammaticus 1931. *Saxonis Grammatici Gesta Danorum*, vol. 1, J. Olrik & H. Raeder (eds). Hauniae. For a translation of this work, see P. Fischer (trans.), H. E. Davidson (ed.) 1979. *Saxo Grammaticus: The History of the Danes* I–IX. Cambridge.
Siris	V. Vidman 1969. *Sylloge inscriptionum religionis Isiacae et Sarapiacae*. Leiden.
Skskm	*Skáldskaparmál*: see Snorri Sturluson 2005. *The Prose Edda*, J. Byock (trans.). London.
SnE	Snorri Sturluson 2005. *The Prose Edda*, J. Byock (trans.). London.
Sögu Hákonar goði	See F. Jónsson (ed.) 1911. *Heimskringla. Noregs konungsögur.* Copenhagen.
Tarquinia Etrusca	A. M. Sgubini Moretti (ed.) 2001. *Tarquinia Etrusca. Una nuova storia*. Rome.
Tarquinia: Ricerche	M. Bonghi Jovino & C. Chiaramonte Treré 1987. *Tarquinia. Ricerche, Scavi e Prospettive*. Milan.
Tarquinia: Testimonianze	M. Bonghi Jovino & C. Chiaramonte Treré (eds) 1997. *Tarquinia. Testimonianze archeologiche e ricostruzione storica*. Rome.
Þrm	*þrymskviða*: see G. Jónsson (ed.) 1954. *Eddukvæði* 1–2. Akureyri.

Vita Prieflingensis	J. Wikarjak & K. Liman (eds) 1966. *Sancti Ottonis episcopi Babenbergensis Vita Prieflingensis* (Monumenta Poloniae Historica, NS.7.1). Warsaw.
Vm	*Vafþrúðnismál*: see G. Jónsson (ed.) 1954. *Eddukvæði* 1–2. Akureyri.
Vsp	*Vǫluspá*: see G. Jónsson (ed.) 1954. *Eddukvæði* 1–2. Akureyri
Völsunga saga	See G. Jónsson (ed.) 1954. *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda 1.* Akureyri.

1

Introduction

Lisbeth Bredholt Christensen, Olav Hammer
and David A. Warburton

THE RATIONALE FOR THIS BOOK

"Religion" is an amorphous concept which has been defined in numerous ways, without any scholarly consensus in sight. Its main features seem to us to be (a) having socially shared activities which bear no direct relation to subsistence, (b) demanding some specific attitude towards death and/or the dead, and (c) generally including a discourse including entities which are beyond this world. Whatever it is, religion seems to be uniquely linked to the human race. It was in Europe and the Middle East that the culture of our immediate ancestors first combined the attributes which are the necessary precursors of religion – burials, plastic art and paintings. It was the religions of groups as diverse as the Greeks and the Scandinavians which seem to have given birth to important traits of our civilization as we define it today. Thus the history and prehistory of Europe is fundamental to the history of the human race and religion – and the history of religion is fundamental to Europe.

Anatomically modern humans, that is, the type of humans to which we belong, arrived on the European continent approximately 40,000 years ago. Their arrival in Europe is associated with the end of the Middle Palaeolithic (which began perhaps 250,000 years earlier in Europe) and the beginning of the Upper Palaeolithic. Significantly, in the Middle East, anatomically modern humans used the same tools of the Middle Palaeolithic assemblages as the Neanderthals, whereas in Europe the Neanderthals are also briefly associated with the Upper Palaeolithic. In the Near East and in Europe, Neanderthals and our ancestors buried their dead – the first ritual act we can identify with certainty. In any case, the Neanderthals died out some 30,000 years ago, and thus the history of the Upper Palaeolithic in Europe is that of the human race. The Upper Palaeolithic is the era of the birth of the first cave paintings and the period when small figurines appear in small numbers, yet more abundantly than in any preceding period.

For most of the Upper Palaeolithic, however, the archaeological evidence of ritual is scant, and it is a matter of debate whether or not it can be interpreted as indicating traces

of religious rituals and beliefs. Yet, this debate is crucial, because what is certain is that material such as burials, cave paintings and figurines is the kind of material that in later times is closely linked to religion (as indications of belief in a beyond, as depictions of myths, and as representations of supernatural beings).

With the Neolithic, a new migration brought new human groups into Europe from the Near East where the concepts of sanctuaries and meeting places were gradually being developed. The Neolithic began some 12,000 years ago in the Near East, reaching France and Scandinavia only thousands of years later. From the start in the Near East, it was marked by special treatment for the dead and buildings which may have served communal purposes. The earliest population movements (beginning more than 11,000 years ago) involved the transfer to the islands – Cyprus, Crete, Sicily – and from each island to the adjacent mainland. It was only millennia later that the movement pushed directly overland, along the Danube and through the area to the north of the Alps. In any case, these new peoples pushed on, probably conquering territory and mingling with the existing population, creating new identities.

As the predominantly hunter-gatherer populations of the Near East began to adopt farming and settled communities began to form, marking the beginning of the transition to the Neolithic era from approximately 12,000 years ago, archaeological remains become more plentiful and from the end of the period also show an increasing regional diversity. Yet even these finds are not unambiguous as concerns what we today call religion, but clearly they represent the "forms" or the "expressions" of what in historical religions is filled with religious "content". It is only from the European Bronze Age that we have access to the earliest written sources (mid-second millennium BCE) that – together with material remains – allow us to document religious life in Europe. Yet although Minoan and Mycenaean documents demonstrate literacy in the Mediterranean, most of our written source material belongs to the Late Iron Age and classical antiquity – as attested by inscriptions in Greek, Etruscan, Punic, Celtic and various Italic languages. Over time, textual and material evidence for religious life in various parts of Europe becomes more plentiful and much more detailed. The diverse names of gods, the myths about them, the rituals carried out to honour or propitiate them, the buildings constructed to worship them in the various parts of the continent demonstrate the cultural wealth and local variability of ancient Europe.

As a consequence of the emergence and ultimate imposition of Christianity, the first religion on the continent with a hegemonic ambition, most local religions were gradually wiped out. Although originally a local variation of Eastern faiths, in general Christianity did not spread organically from person to person, so much as having been selected and protected by rulers who then expected their people to follow. The Roman emperor Constantine initially privileged Christianity over its rivals. After Julian the Apostate (reigned 360–63 CE) tried to re-establish religious freedom in the empire, his successors aimed at revoking his efforts, and in the 380s CE Theodosius elevated Christianity to the status of being the only religion tolerated within the empire. This initiated a process that eventually ensured that competing non-Christian alternatives disappeared as living religions. These were initially banished from the Mediterranean, and subsequently from the Germanic, Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian, Slavic and Baltic areas, finally reaching the utmost peripheries of Europe with the forced conversion of the Sami and other Uralic-speaking peoples in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[1]

The picture of religion in ancient Europe that emerges even from such a thumbnail sketch is one of diversity and complexity. The time depth is vast, the evidence – whether archaeological or written – is difficult to interpret, and the variety of religions documented by the sources is bewildering. For students, scholars and members of the broader public wishing to expand their horizons in this field, it is challenging in the extreme to attempt to gain an overall picture of religious history before the advent of Christianity. The difficulties are compounded by the fact that much of the scholarly literature on some local pre-Christian religions is written in languages that are largely inaccessible to an international readership, such as Icelandic, Swedish, Polish, Finnish or Latvian. Hence, scholars working in the field will typically be truly familiar with one or two particular traditions, while the non-specialist may find it an almost impossible task to gain a broad understanding of pre-Christian religious Europe.

The Handbook of Religions in Ancient Europe is intended to remedy this gap. Specialists in various areas of pre-Christian religious history have contributed chapters that provide brief state-of-the-art surveys of their fields of expertise, targeted at non-specialist readers, together with a list of suggested further readings.[2] Besides aiming at accessibility, all authors were presented with two sets of challenges.

First, they were asked to base their chapters on the best available sources and reflect critically on the nature of these sources and on the challenges involved in interpreting them: how does one access the rituals and religious conceptions of people known to us only from the material remains unearthed by archaeologists? What information can be gleaned from place-names, inscriptions and coins? What insights can we gain from written accounts, given that these are often the products of literate elites, or of hostile outsiders such as Christian missionaries?

Secondly, they were invited to treat religions as plural and multidimensional, manifest as discourse, action, organization and material culture; produced by specific people with at times quite diverse interests: distinct local groups, religious or social elites versus others, or men versus women. As is clear from the chapters that follow, various regions and epochs provide very different possibilities of understanding this multidimensionality. In some areas (e.g. classical antiquity) written sources and material remains are plentiful, and internal diversity obvious. For others, such as prehistoric Finland, indirect evidence such as the distribution of loanwords for religious concepts or place-names incorporating diverse terms for the sacred gives a picture of different religious strata. For yet others, such as the Baltic region, archaeological remains are almost non-existent, written sources appear only at a late date, and the evidence from oral history provides few clues to allow for such a differentiated picture.

Three terms in the title merit some comment. A *handbook*, and particularly one the size of the present one, can only provide a partial sample. Many other areas and religions of ancient Europe could have been included, but at the cost of producing a vast encyclopedia of essays. Pre-Christian Gaul, Scotland, Estonia, Hungary, Dacia, Illyria, Thracia and many other regions of great intrinsic interest were excluded for practical rather than theoretically defensible reasons.

Our conception of *Europe* is similarly pragmatic. The very denomination "Europe" is, of course, an anachronism for much of the time covered in this book, and would have been completely incomprehensible for most of the peoples whose religions we study here. Furthermore, globalization is not a modern phenomenon. Ice Age figurines show large

similarities over an area from France to the Urals and testify to some kind of contact; trade contacts with regions outside present-day European borders were common since the Bronze Age. Excavations of a Viking settlement on the island of Helgö near Stockholm unearthed a Buddha statuette from northern India, a scoop from Egypt, and coins from the Arabic-speaking world. The amber route connecting large parts of Europe has linked the Baltic and the Mediterranean since the early second millennium BCE, and has thus contributed to the diffusion of cultural traits.

Although this volume is focused on Europe as a bounded geographical entity, we have asked contributors to mention possible interactions with other cultural regions, and individual chapters discuss such contacts whenever our very imperfect understanding of interregional religious relations in ancient times allows for this. As regards the earliest prehistory, what happened in Europe cannot be understood when isolated from developments in Africa and the Levant, and therefore the chapters on the Palaeolithic and the Neolithic refer to developments in these areas.

Finally, *religion* is a contested term that we have also decided to understand in a broad and rather pragmatic sense. Few of the groups presented in this volume had any native term for what we would characterize as "religion". Those who did, mainly Latin authors, used the term polemically: acceptable *religio* was distinguished from unacceptable *superstitio*. We use the term in the sense shared by many of our colleagues in the study of religion: sources that indicate a preoccupation – in narrative, action or material culture – with a postulated supra-human realm have been interpreted as elements of a cultural domain we can call "religion". In principle, however, it must be accepted that what is studied by students of the academic disciplines of the study of religion, anthropology, archaeology, sociology, and so on defines what is understood as "religion". Our understanding of the phenomenon itself is thus at least partially a reflection of our discipline more than being a theoretically defined reality which is "out there".

This book comes in two parts, one dealing with prehistoric religion, and one presenting a variety of religions that have also left written traces. Although the boundary between prehistory and history is to some extent artificial (because continuities in material culture may bridge an imagined border between writing culture and non-writing culture, and because textual sources, even when there, are sometimes sparse and more ambiguous than material sources), the division into two parts does reflect the fact that with the introduction of writing, new kinds of data begin to emerge. The identity of the deities, the names of festivals and the rationale for celebrating them can be easier to discern from texts than from images and artifacts.

PREHISTORIC RELIGION

There is no consensus on the issue of whether or not one can talk about "prehistoric religion", and the work of those who have actually dealt with the matter has led in very different directions. Scholars of religion have few methodological tools to work with material culture when no texts are available to "explain" or support interpretations of the material.

In recent years, a number of scholars have begun to theorize on the origins of religion via cognitive approaches. These approaches understand "origins" largely as biologically hardwired mental dispositions and their expressions, and presuppose that ancient

materials can be understood on the basis of observations made on modern people. One of the basic assumptions of such a method means assuming that the present character of religion as understood today corresponds to the origins. Given the ambiguous character of material culture, it is always possible to debate how it can be interpreted. However, the origins might be very different from the modern form – and thus developing interpretive frameworks based on hypotheses related to the existing forms of religion might be the wrong approach. By contrast, prehistoric religion in the sense studied by archaeologists involves interpreting the material of the past as it is preserved, and these materials have led them to formulate a diverse set of views. We have decided to provide several different such archaeological perspectives. This allows an insight into the work being done today and into the differences in approaches and interpretation.

The current debate about the origins, forms and development of religion in prehistory is also a reflection of the evolution of archaeology. Until the end of the Second World War, archaeology was largely an empirical discipline occasionally exploited for nationalist reasons. Some time after the war, this "traditional" approach gave way to a gradual transformation called the "New Archaeology" which affected archaeological thinking, mostly in the English-speaking countries, the Netherlands and Scandinavia. The major concept of this trend was to try to study the material on its own terms and not as a mere search for national identities or in order to establish chronologies. The methods were more rigorously "scientific" and aimed at answering modest questions related to economic and technological developments, occasionally touching on identity, but usually setting aside complicated issues such as religion. One particular trend of the New Archaeology has since been dubbed "processual archaeology", particularly by the "post-processual" archaeologists who in recent decades have largely spurred on a debate about religion and cognition – issues which somehow fell by the wayside in the theoretical debates for most of the second half of the twentieth century. The terms "processual" and "post-processual" archaeology must be understood in terms of "structuralism" and "post-structuralism" and are thus more polemic categories in the sense of "schools of thought" than categories of thinking. Regardless of the different eras and approaches, the current essays represent virtually all of the different strains of archaeological thought as they are expressed today (including those that are viewed by many as outmoded, such as the origins of religion as a single strain).

Yet while prehistoric archaeologists are increasingly turning to the subject of religion, religion remains a minor issue within prehistoric archaeology as an academic field (one of the reasons being that before coming to interpretative questions at all, archaeologists need first to resolve more basic issues regarding the stratigraphy, typology and chronology of a material), and most archaeologists are reluctant to discuss the matter. Fortunately, some recognized researchers were willing to do so, and we thank these authors. Two archaeologists (d'Errico and Hodder) who were interested but had no time to contribute are represented by sketches of their thoughts prepared by us.

In selecting contributors to this section the aim was that the authors would – as far as possible – represent the very different approaches within the field. Overall, the essays are from and about archaeologists who represent important trends which will be found in the literature, and will ultimately determine what archaeologists and students of religion will use as the building blocks for the understanding of "prehistoric religion". The essays thus reflect some of what is being done in a major "work in progress".

The first section in this book begins with a brief chapter by Lisbeth Bredholt Christensen and David A. Warburton which provides some basic guidelines to the study of prehistoric religions. Then follows an account by Jarl Nordbladh who looks back on a long archaeological career, explaining what he was looking for, and how he looked for it. The account points out to the general student of religion what has happened in archaeology in the last few decades and how archaeologists work. In general, Nordbladh is sceptical as to the possibilities of speaking at great length about religion in the Bronze Age, as this was most probably not yet a distinct domain but simply diverse practices integrated into everyday life at all levels.

From here, a series of chapters cover the Palaeolithic, the Neolithic, and the Bronze Age. David A. Warburton summarizes Francesco d'Errico's research on Palaeolithic artifacts which suggests that the origin of "symbolling" lies before the advent of anatomically modern humans and that the production of material culture in itself was decisive for the development of thought.

Emmanuel Anati argues that already in the Palaeolithic there was religion with rituals, myths, ancestor cults, morals and belief in a life after death. Some of these elements can be traced even further back in evolutionary history, but with the Upper Palaeolithic these isolated elements were united into the form of religion. Anati concludes that religion in the Palaeolithic was largely the same globally, whereas the Neolithic saw the development of regional variants and the introduction of priests and gods.

Lisbeth Bredholt Christensen and David A. Warburton look at the work of Ian Hodder who in his work with Neolithic material has come close to developing a methodology which resembles that of the study of religion. Whereas for many years Hodder refused to speak about religion, his recent works are dedicated to this subject.

Jörg Petrasch raises the question of whether Neolithic figurines of central and south-eastern Europe should be interpreted in a religious (cultic, ancestor-related) context or not, and concludes that they should. Nonetheless, he draws a picture of the Neolithic as a period when religion did not (yet) play any large role and religious specialists, cultic areas and communal rituals were not (yet) common, but in the course of which (and even more with the Bronze Age) the role of these elements increased.

Charlotte Damm compares Neolithic religious practices in farmer-pastoralist southern Scandinavia with hunter-fisher Fennoscandia. In southern Scandinavia grave structures and burial practices are seen as relating to ancestors, while depositions point towards other kinds of powers. In Fennoscandia, material such as rock art and burial practices is seen as linking individuals, animals and deceased group members in a more diffuse and malleable world-view similar to what can be observed also among modern hunters.

Flemming Kaul argues that it is possible for archaeologists to study religion in the Bronze Age and that the evidence shows an elaborate mythology concerned with the journey of the sun, which can be read from images on razors. In his view, Bronze Age peoples saw the sun as a god, although not, or only sometimes, as an anthropomorphic or zoomorphic one. Whereas razors were the medium for illustrating cosmology and myth, rock art was the medium for illustrating rituals.

Kristian Kristiansen first gives a theoretical overview of how the interest in religion among archaeologists partly reflects societal conjunctures. Secondly, he gives his interpretation of Bronze Age religion, placing Scandinavian material in a larger European and Indo-European context. Linking textual and archaeological material he suggests that

religion throughout Europe at this time was characterized by a considerable degree of unity. In particular, he adduces the example of "the Divine Twins", who played a significant role both as a pair of gods and as a reflection of a real, dual leadership.

Finally, Lisbeth Bredholt Christensen and David A. Warburton make some remarks about the whole prehistorical archaeological project.

THE HISTORICAL PERIOD

The second of the two sections in this book proceeds to survey a range of religions that are not only documented in archaeological remains (no matter how important these continue to be), but also via texts of various kinds. Our selection covers a range of religions documented in a heterogeneous variety of sources, and differing widely from each other.

We begin our exploration in the Mediterranean area, with David A. Warburton's survey of Minoan and Mycenaean religions. These can be reconstructed on the basis of texts (although these concern administrative matters and only tangentially deal with anything relevant to our concept of religion), architecture and iconography. From these sources we can with some confidence infer that Bronze Age Aegean peoples worshipped gods and goddesses such as Potnia and/or Ja-sa-sa-ra, which belong exclusively to this earliest stage of recorded history, as well as a number of divinities known also from later, Greek sources, such as Athena and Zeus. Iconography and archaeological sites provide evidence of rituals, but the import of many of these often remains unclear. This chapter concludes with an effort to link the Bronze Age materials to later developments in the Mediterranean area, as described in other chapters of this book.

Next follows Jean M. Turfa's chapter on the Etruscans. Besides artifacts unearthed by archaeologists, some of the continent's earliest religious texts documenting the religious practices and beliefs of the Etruscans range from inscriptions in their own language to Latin texts describing them as a deeply religious but also very superstitious people. The latter description points at an obvious difficulty in interpreting written sources: written by outsiders, they depict Etruscan culture in a biased perspective. The picture that emerges is one of a diversity of cults, comprising distinctive elements such as processions, rituals of divination, and a belief in an afterlife.

The Iberian Peninsula, discussed by Francisco Marco Simón, is an area where a confluence of Roman, Hellenic and other religions profoundly influenced several ethnic groups, speaking (as far as can be documented from the evidence) several distinct Indo-European and non-Indo-European languages. Phoenician remains going back to the Bronze Age again show that the area was part of a transregional network of trade and cultural contacts. Archaeological remains from around the peninsula indicate the existence of marked social hierarchies, as can be seen from the monumental funeral complexes in which local chieftains were buried. These burial sites, together with iconographic materials, testify to the aristocratic world of ancient Iberia. Due to the paucity of textual materials, we have few clues to which deities were worshipped there, and what kinds of rituals were carried out in their honour.

A range of different people, speaking related languages, inhabited the Italian Peninsula: Oscans, Umbrians and many others. The sources for their religious concepts, institutions and rituals include archaeological remains and inscriptions in local Italic languages, as

well as mentions in Latin sources; and similar challenges of interpretation apply. Italic religious practices, as summarized by Guy Bradley and Fay Glinister, appear to have been concerned with health and fertility, and were centred on sites of ritual activity where thousands of votive offerings were left behind by visitors. The epigraphic evidence is patchy, but complements our understanding by providing details of communal rituals, names of deities, and evidence of a calendar of festivities.

Etruscan, Oscan, Umbrian and other local traditions were phased out as Latium and the city of Rome gained an increasing dominance over the Italian Peninsula and beyond. Compared to the evidence for earlier religions in the area, the sources for Roman religion are, of course, copious; the main challenge for a chapter on this topic is not to eke out information from meagre remains, but rather to condense scholarship into a manageable format. Susanne William Rasmussen's chapter summarizes basic information on concepts and rituals, priests and politics, deities and festivals. Roman religion, like many other religions described in this volume, was not concerned with theological orthodoxy, but with correctly performed ritual. Sacrifices to the gods were of paramount importance to ensure the well-being of the state, the family and the individual. Divinatory rituals gave privileged access to the will of the deities. The pantheon of gods and goddesses, on the other hand, was rather fluid, and new gods could be introduced. A section on the cult of Cybele shows how a goddess of foreign origin could be incorporated into Roman religion because diviners had indicated that this was required.

Also in the case of Greek religion, the mass of evidence is overwhelming, the amount of scholarly literature is immense, and the historical picture is one of a bewildering variety of coexisting forms of religion. Lars Albinus guides readers into this landscape by presenting some of the key sources and the controversies surrounding their status: to what extent do the works of, for example, Hesiod and Homer bear witness to Greek religious traditions, and to what degree are they the literary constructions of their authors? Some of the main traditions within Greek religion as a whole are then presented: the Orphics, various traditions of Olympian or chthonian orientation, and mystery cults with the Eleusinian mysteries as paradigmatic example. One aim of this volume is to transcend the image of local religions as self-contained units; in the case of Greek religion, Albinus points at the existence of structures shared with the religions of other peoples speaking Indo-European languages, as well as indications of contact with the Semitic East.

The chapters on Roman and Greek religion include sections on cults centred more narrowly on a single deity, in particular those of Cybele and Demeter. The two chapters that follow provide a more in-depth coverage of two important cults of classical antiquity. A chapter by Birgitte Bøgh discusses the traditions and rituals associated with the goddess Isis. This case provides a particularly apt example of wide-ranging cultural contacts across large geographical areas. Originally Egyptian, and attested as far back as the third millennium BCE, Isis entered Greek space with the arrival on the Greek mainland of Egyptians who brought their deity with them. Because of similarities between Isis and various Greek and Roman goddesses, Isis over time took over functions associated with these divinities. Particularly important were her similarities with Demeter, the goddess celebrated in the mysteries of Eleusis, which contributed to making the cult of Isis a mystery religion, as well. Ultimately, Isis became one of the most popular gods of later antiquity. From Rome the cult spread to the rest of the empire, but ultimately lost momentum in competition with other cults, and was finally banned as a result of the hegemonic ambitions of the Christian Church.

One of the most serious competitors in the plural religious marketplace of late antiquity, and at a point a nearly pan-European cult as attested to by sites ranging from Britain in the north-west to the Balkans in the south-east, is the Mithras cult, described in a chapter by Manfred Clauss. Owing to the nature of the sources – copious archaeological evidence with very little textual materials to explain the nature of that evidence – Mithraism has been interpreted in very diverse (and sometimes rather fanciful) ways. Clauss's chapter treads a cautious path in discussing what, with some degree of confidence, we may know about the origins and spread of the cult of Mithras, its temples, rituals and priesthood. In particular, interpretations of its best-known iconographic representation, the so-called bull-slaying scene, are discussed. As the cult spread across much of Europe, often by soldiers transplanted to new posts, Mithraism took on local shapes, and was syncretized with other religions. A final wave of popularity for Mithras occurred in the western part of the Roman Empire in the second half of the fourth century CE. In this case as well, Christians with the ambition to extend their religious monopoly went to extraordinary lengths to stamp out this religion, and archaeologists have reconstructed how mobs went on the rampage to demolish Mithraic sites.

A division of academic labour has largely allocated the study of the Platonic tradition to philosophers rather than to scholars of religion. The chapter on religious Platonism by Kevin Corrigan and Michael Harrington amply demonstrates that the sharp distinction between religion and philosophy does not hold. Platonic speculation on rebirth, on the transcendent source of true knowledge, his mythic account of the origin of the world, and the spiritual cosmology of his successors surely make the Platonic tradition as much a religious discourse as a philosophical one, albeit a philosophical religion for an educated elite.

From here on, we leave the Mediterranean area, the remainder of the chapters covering the northern half of the European continent. Once used indiscriminately to denote a range of peoples with putatively shared linguistic roots, it is now largely accepted that there is no such thing as a "Celtic culture" or "Celtic religion" in the singular. A more locally circumscribed approach nevertheless remains valid, and a chapter on insular Celtic religion (by Karen Bek-Pedersen) largely focuses on the religion of pre-Christian Ireland. Once again the nature of the sources presents major interpretive challenges. The texts that can give us a glimpse of Celtic religion deal with myths and legends rather than religious practices and institutions, and were composed when Ireland had already been Christianized for a long time and the local religion was only a distant memory. The only traces we have of Celtic lived religion comes from archaeological evidence. The picture that emerges from the written sources is of a conception of reality where the supernatural is present in our own world. Irish myths take place in the landscape of Ireland, but one where specific sites are closely connected with deities or ancient heroes. Archaeological findings attest to places devoted to these beings, but give us only a very incomplete understanding of what actually took place there.

Three chapters discuss the religions of areas inhabited by Germanic-speaking tribes. Continental Germanic religion (discussed in a chapter by Rudolf Simek) is attested from archaeological finds dating from around 400 BCE, and up to the time of Christianization in the third and fourth centuries CE. Information in written sources is scant, and once again there are major problems of interpretation, compounded by the habit of classical authors to substitute Roman names for the Germanic appellations of the deities they mention. The most important ritual directed at these deities was sacrifice, attested to both in the sources

and in the archaeological material. Best preserved are offerings deposited in peat bogs, where swords, shields, daggers, lances, spears, bows and arrows, saddles, bridles, tools and other objects have been recovered. Despite a number of very rich sacrificial sites, Simek concedes that ultimately we know little about these ritual depositions. Towards the end of the period of time covered here, mission activity was intense, and those elements of Germanic religion that managed to survive were largely assimilated into folklore regarding spirits and demons.

Information about Anglo-Saxon religion, as discussed in a chapter by John Niles, must be eked out of necessarily biased early Latin as well as later textual evidence, cues to be gleaned from Old English vocabulary items and place-names, and various aspects of material culture. The texts are particularly problematic: Bede, who completed his *Ecclesiastical History* in 731 CE, writes about pre-Christian mores in a way that probably reflects his fantasies and ideological agenda more than it accurately depicts ancient customs. Vocabulary items that provide clues to Anglo-Saxon religion include the names of the weekdays, terms for some kind of life-spirit and for otherworldly regions, and words of pre-Christian origin used to designate elements of Christian religion. Finally, archaeological evidence can give us some idea of conceptions of the afterlife, albeit with the caveat that the treatment of the dead can stem from ritualized behaviour to show respect for the deceased, rather than from any distinct conceptions of a life beyond physical death.

Scandinavian religion (the topic of a chapter by Britt-Mari Näsström) is presented in the most copious written sources for any Germanic-speaking group. That does not make the information any simpler to evaluate, since most texts come from one single area (Iceland), reflect a highly literate and learned social stratum, and were composed generations after the introduction of Christianity. The sources contain abundant information on Old Norse mythology but tell us almost nothing about how rituals were carried out. Among the myths presented in this material are accounts of the creation and destruction of the world, as well as dramatic stories recounting the lives and adventures of the Nordic gods and goddesses. Information about rituals and religious institutions is harder to come by, but archaeological findings complement the textual sources. Thus, in recent decades great halls with key social and religious functions have been discovered, as have the remains of sacrifices. One of the most enigmatic rituals, mentioned in several texts, is *sejðr*, magic that was performed by means of *galdr*, that is, singing in a shrill voice, either in order to harm people, or as a remedy to cure illness.

Further to the east lived various Slavic-speaking peoples, whose religion is discussed in a chapter by Leszek Słupecki. Again, our knowledge of the mythology and religion of these groups is limited. As with several other traditions discussed in this book, most of the written information comes from (often unsympathetic) outsiders and was recorded during and after the conversion of Slavs to Christianity in the ninth to twelfth centuries CE. Archaeological findings from a few main sites complement the meagre textual evidence. The fragmentary nature of our knowledge of Slavic religion can be seen from the fact that not a single complete myth has come down to us. What we have are names of gods, and some brief descriptions of Slavic temples and of religious activities carried out there. The site described in most detail in written source materials is the shrine of Sventovit in Arcona on the island of Rügen. The most impressive archaeological remains of Slavic pre-Christian religious architecture were found in the village of Gross Raden in Mecklenburg. Clues from these and other locations document the human-like conception of the Slavic

deities, and indicate that sacrifice and rituals of divination played an important role in the religious lives of these peoples.

Baltic religion, the topic of the chapter by Sigma Ankrava, is the umbrella term for the similar but not identical traditions of three linguistically defined groups: the Old Prussians, Lithuanians and Latvians. Whereas the Old Prussians had been exterminated or assimilated by their conquerors by the sixteenth century, the two latter groups, although formally Christianized, retained a separate ethno-linguistic identity and continued to pursue some of their local religious traditions. Latvia, in particular, was colonized under a regime of strict separation that kept Latvians away from learned occupations, business, trade or arts until the middle of the nineteenth century. In part because of this isolation, local Latvian customs and oral literature – folk songs and magic formulas in particular – reflect pre-Christian religious conceptions and practices. Although great caution must be exerted in order to separate everyday folk practices from reflexes of earlier religious practices, these sources indicate that myths and rituals focused on a complex pantheon composed of mother goddesses, agricultural deities and celestial gods.

The chapter on Finnish religion (by Veikko Anttonen) grapples with the vast time span of its topic: from the earliest documented human presence in Finland around 9000 BCE until 1200 CE when Christianity was introduced. The earliest strata are, of course, primarily accessible by archaeological means, but the introduction of loanwords into the Finnish language and the geographical distribution of different names for the sacred in toponyms provide important clues to ancient Finnish religions. For the later period, textual evidence can with caution be used to understand changes in these traditions. The combined evidence suggests that the earliest religious practices in this area were shamanic in nature, and revolved around bear ceremonialism. Bear slaying rituals and symbolic bear weddings continued to be practised well into the historical period, and are documented from seventeenth-century texts. While such practices are reminiscent of those of other circumpolar peoples, the spread of an Indo-European-speaking population in the Late Neolithic era contributed to introducing changes in cosmology and religion, characterized by social hierarchies, spatial and gender divisions, and systems of purity and impurity.

Although the second section of this volume has not followed a strictly chronological trajectory, it does conclude with one of the peoples of the European continent that was among the very last to be converted to Christianity. A few ethnic groups in the utmost northern regions of the continent, and in remote areas near the Ural Mountains of Russia, were only loosely integrated into European nation states until well into the early modern period. The Sami, as documented in the final chapter by Håkan Rydving, retained their pre-Christian religious heritage until they were forcibly converted to Lutheran Christianity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Many of the written sources were recorded by missionaries for the new religion, who were highly critical of Sami traditions. Other evidence comes from ritual drums, sacrificial sites and other material traces of Sami religion. Together, these serve to document a broad range of rituals, including sacrifices, life cycle rituals, a bear festival and a range of crisis rituals that involved enlisting the services of a specialist, the *nåejtie*. Underlying these practices was a multi-layered cosmology that can also be reconstructed with some confidence. All of this was repressed with great force by the representatives of state and church: the Sami were punished for the use of ritual drums and sacrificial sites, many of which were destroyed by the authorities. By the late eighteenth century, most of the overt forms of Sami pre-Christian religion had

disappeared, but stories about some of the helping spirits and rulers transmuted into local folklore and are still told today.

NOTES

1. Although Christian hegemony may have been a political goal for much of the period discussed here, it should be emphasized that hegemony was never achieved. Pockets of Diaspora Jews and communities of Muslims in places such as southern Spain, Sicily and the Balkans adhered to their own religious traditions. Greek and Roman religion ceased being practised in the forms these traditions had in classical antiquity, but were well known and continued to permeate all expressions of learned culture. Folk beliefs with only a tangential connection to theologically normative Christianity were widespread, and Christianity itself, of course, came in many different shapes. However, these forms of European religious pluralism fall well beyond the scope of the present volume.
2. As far as possible, we have asked authors to suggest titles in the most commonly read languages, i.e. English and German. Due to the nature of scholarship on religions in ancient Europe, occasionally titles in French, Spanish and Italian have been included. Some of the best scholarship on specific regions has been published in regional languages, but we have largely eschewed titles in Danish, Polish or Latvian, for example, because they will presumably only be useful to few readers of this volume.